Dr *WILLIAMS*'s FOURTH SERMON AT Mr. BOYLE's Lecture, 1695.

IMPRIMATUR,

April 1.
1695.

Guil. Lancaſter.

The Truth of the Holy Scriptures.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. *Martin's in the Fields*, April 1. 1695.

BEING THE

Fourth of the LECTURE

For this preſent YEAR,

Founded by the Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE, Eſquire.

By *JOHN WILLIAMS*, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majeſty.

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HEB. I. 1, 2.

God who at ſundry times, and in divers manners ſpake in time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken unto us by his Son, &c.

IN theſe words, there is contained (as I have before ſhewed)

1. A deſcription of Revelation, 'tis God's *ſpeaking*.

2. The Certainty of it, 'tis by way of declaration, *God who at ſundry times*, &c.

3. The Order obſerved in delivering this Revelation, *it was at ſundry times*, &c.

4. The perfection and concluſion of all, 'tis in *theſe laſt days by his Son*.

Under the Second I have ſhewed,

1. That God has actually revealed his Will *at ſundry times, and in divers manners*.

2. What are the Characters of true Revelation.

3. I am now in order to prove that the Scriptures of the *Old* and *New Teſtament* do contain the Matter of Divine Revelation, and have upon them the Characters belonging to it.

For the better diſpoſing of what I have to ſay under this Head of Diſcourſe, I ſhall obſerve,

1. 'Tis one thing to aſſert and prove the matter of Scripture to be true, and another to prove it to be of Divine Revelation.

2. 'Tis one thing to prove the matter of Scripture to be of Divine Revelation, and another to prove theſe Books to be of Divine Inſpiration.

3. 'Tis one thing to aſſert that there were once ſuch Books ſo inſpired; and another thing to prove this Set of Books, which now make up and compoſe the Canon of the Old and New Teſtament, to be thoſe very Books.

From hence ariſe Four Queſtions, *viz.*

Queſt. 1. How we can prove the Matter of Scripture to be true?

Q. 2. How we can prove the Matter of Scripture to be of Divine Revelation? Books of mere Human Compoſition may contain nothing but Truth, without any Supernatural Aſſiſtance; and

and therefore though we were never ſo well able to maintain and prove the Truth of the Matter, that is not ſufficient, unleſs we can advance higher, and prove the Authority and Divinity of the Matter?

Q. 3. How we can prove thoſe Books to be of Divine Inſpiration? The Epiſtle of *Clemens Romanus* was ſometime read in the Church (as the *Apocrypha* anciently was, and is now with us) becauſe of the Excellency and Profitableneſs of the Matter; but yet it was not eſteemed to be Canonical, and of immediate Inſpiration from God?

Q. 4. How we prove theſe Books, that are now extant and received by the Chriſtian Church as Canonical, to be thoſe Books which were once in time paſt wrote by Inſpiration from God?

It will be of ſome uſe to us in the proſecution of this Argument, to conſider the Firſt Queſtion, concerning the Truth of the Matter of Scripture, by it ſelf, and apart from the Divine Authority of it.

Now the Matter of Scripture is of various nature, ſuch as Morality, Doctrinal Revelation, Inſtitution, Prophecy and Hiſtory: Of which the

the greateſt part will be here ſet aſide: For it is not neceſſary to prove the Truth of the Moral part of it, which is no other than the Dictate of Nature; and therefore, though explain'd, confirmed, and illuſtrated in Scripture by many uſeful Rules, Principles and Obſervations, needs no proof.

That of Doctrine and Inſtitution, falls in with the Divine Authority, and ſo belongs to the Second Queſtion.

Prophecy, if yet to be accompliſhed, is not capable of other proof than Revelation; and if already fulfilled, by the Event following and correſpondent to the Prediction, it is the proof of it ſelf.

So that the Part now remaining to be proved more eſpecially, is Scripture Hiſtory; which is a Relation of matter of Fact, of what has happened, been declared, or done, in the ſeveral Periods and Ages of the World for Four thouſand Years together, and upwards.

Under which Notion, I do not queſtion but it may be made appear, That there is more to be ſaid for the truth of Scripture-Hiſtory, than for any thing of that kind in the whole World.

I don't queſtion again, but it may be made appear, that no Authors had greater advantages for Information,

Information in the Subjects they treat of; nor were there ever any Writings that bore upon them more ample marks of Ability, Impartiality, and Care. So that if after all *that* is to be ſuſpected, nothing of that kind is certain, and we call in queſtion all matters of the like nature whatſoever.

But this is further to be inquired into.

Now of this kind, there are ſome things to be found only in Scripture, and no where elſe. In which caſe we have no other way to judge of the truth of it, than by the Credibility of the matter, the Self-agreement, its Concordance with time, place, and other circumſtances of Action, together with the Credit and Reputation of the Pen-men of it.

But there are other things which fall in with other Writings; and then beſides the former way of trial, we are to have recourſe to ſuch Books, to compare them, and determine concerning the truth by ſuch a compariſon.

So that we have three ſorts of Proof before us, or ſo many Characters by which we may judge concerning the Truth of what the Scripture relates: *viz.*

1. The Credibility of the Matter therein revealed.

2. Self consistence and Self agreement.

3. Its concordance with other Books of good and sufficient Authority; where such there are.

And if this be made out, we have as much Evidence for the Truth of Scripture as is possible to have, in our circumstances; and where the Matters related were transacted in place and time far remote from us. For all the Evidence we can have, is to be resolved into Testimony, and that Testimony into the Credibility of the Relators, or of the Matters related: And if we have as much Evidence of this kind as the nature of the thing will bear and admit, we have as much as is reasonable in it self, and sufficient to ground a certainty upon. For according as the nature of the thing is, and the ground upon which its Proof and Evidence depends, such is the Certainty: And as in things Mathematical, Demonstration is the Proof; and in things Natural and Sensible, Sense is the Proof; and in things Rational and Moral, Reason and Argument are the Proof; so in Matters of Fact (where we our selves are not present) Testimony and Records are the Proof; though for a further confirmation

firmation of it, there is the collateral proof of Moral Evidence, *viz.* the credibility of the Matter, and the Perſons, into whoſe Teſtimony and Veracity the Matters are finally reſolved. And beyond this we cannot go, in the Evidence for the truth of the Matters of Fact; and conſequently, if we have this Evidence, we have as great a certainty in things of this nature, as Demonſtration is in things Mathematical, and Senſe in things ſenſible; I ſay, beyond this we cannot go, unleſs we advance to ſupernatural Evidence; but that belongs not to this place.

So that here we have no reaſon to doubt; and where there is no reaſon to doubt, there is certainty. And if we can be certain of any thing we our ſelves have not ſeen, or been preſent at, we may be certain of what is recorded in the Scripture: Since there is no Evidence for any thing of that kind, which we have not for the Truth of Scripture; and I may ſay we have that Evidence for it, which no Matters of Fact beſides have. If then there be any certainty in ſuch things, if any credit be to be given to them; then there is here a ſufficient Evidence to ground that Certainty and our Belief of it upon: And if there be no certainty in them, and no ground to believe them; then there is no certainty

in the world, and no credit to be given to whatever is, or has been allow'd by others in the world: Then there is no more credit to be given to the Commentaries of *Cæsar* (which he wrote himself) nor to the Histories of the Four Empires, nay to those of our own Nation; than there is to *Achilles Tatius* or *Heliodorus*, than to the Vainest Romances, the Fables of Poets, or the Legends of the most Superstitious and Credulous Ages of the world.

And with all our Histories, though never so famed, and commonly received; we are in no better a condition, than if *Varro's fabulous and obscure Age* had been continued, and all the Ages were now this day what it was before the *Olympiads*, wrapt up in Invention and Conjecture.

But if there be any credit to be given to such Memorials, and that we read approved Histories with another sort of appetite and assurance, than we do Fables; and that we read *Lucan* (a Poetical Historian) with another sort of relish than *Ovid's Metamorphoses*; then the like Credit is to be given to the Scriptures as to any; and so much the more, as the Evidence proper to its kind is beyond the Evidence we have for any other Writings whatsoever.

And this I ſhall undertake and proſecute, by proving,

1. That the Scripture has ſufficient Evidence of that kind to ground a certainty upon.

2. That it has all the Evidence that any Writings or Matters of this kind have, and more.

In order to which it may well ſerve as an Introduction to what is to follow, briefly to reflect upon the Writers themſelves and their Qualifications; upon whoſe Credit and Authority there muſt be confeſſedly ſometimes an abſolute reliance. Since the Relators of matters of Fact profeſs not to Write out of their own Heads, but to receive what they Write from a conſtant and uninterrupted Tradition, or to Collect from the beſt Records and Memorials, or to ſet down what is of their own Knowledge and Obſervation: And therefore the Reputation of their Reports and Narratives doth very much depend upon their Skill and Judgment, that they be not abuſed by falſe Informations, and upon their Honeſty and Integrity in not putting abuſes upon the World.

As for the ways of Information, there is nothing of that kind wanting in the Sacred Penmen.

men. For the First Writer, *Moſes*, lived ſo near upon the Traditionary Age, and the things he Writes of are of ſuch a nature, as may well be ſuppoſed to be deliver'd down without any difficulty from Progenitors to Poſterity, had there been no other means of Conveyance; and eſpecially (as has been before ſuggeſted, Sermon II.) if we conſider the few hands they were to paſs through, when at the moſt Eight Perſons only in ſucceſſion continued the Line of above Two thouſand five hundred years, from the Deluge to the time of *Moſes*; and that the Matters were ſuch as all thoſe held themſelves concerned to deliver them down as they had received them. Foraſmuch as all the Prophecies they had receiv'd, which concerned the Good of Mankind, and of their Poſterity, depended upon the careful and faithful preſervation of theſe Memorials; both as to Time and Pedigrees, as well as the Matters which the Series of Times and Deſcents were to be the great Supporters of.

From hence it was afterwards that theſe Chronological Tables, and Genealogical Rolls were in all times exactly kept, and which upon occaſion they might have recourſe to; and that there were Annals in future Ages that were looked upon as Sacred Repoſitories: And from whence

whence the Holy Writers drew their Materials, and to which they do Refer, as may be obſerved in the Books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*.

But if we add hereunto, That a great part of what is the Subject of Holy Writ, was what the Writers themſelves had the Perſonal Knowledge of, bore a part in, and what happened in their own Times; it gives the greater Authority to what they have Written. And this was the caſe of *Moſes* as to the Four laſt of his Books; of *Joſhua*, of *Samuel*, of the Prophets, and of the Evangelical Writers. So that if we will grant any thing to be allowed to Tradition, to Records of Ages, to Reports of Eye and Ear-Witneſſes, there is the higheſt Credit to be given to the Divine Authors, in what they have Collected and made Report of. And what has been done with ſo much Faithfulneſs, Impartiality, and Judgment (as their Compoſers teſtify) that even that what tends to the diſparagement of their Nation and Anceſtors, their Families and Perſons, is not concealed, when it might tend to the Glory of God, the Reaſons of the Divine Proceedings towards them, or the giving any Life to the Matters they Relate. A practice rarely to be obſerved in other Authors; and when it is, doth give Credit to what they Report.

But

But the chief thing is the Credibility of the Matter (which I ſhall now proceed to)

1. The Credibility of the Matter, which is a ſtanding Character that we are to judge of the Truth of a Relation by.

But then we muſt judge aright concerning the Credibility of it. For that at firſt ſight may ſeem to be Incredible, which upon farther conſideration and examination may prove to be Credible: As St. *Paul* ſaith to *Agrippa*, Acts 26. 8. *Why ſhould it be thought a thing incredible with you that God ſhould raiſe the dead?* It might ſeem a thing Incredible at the firſt propoſal, as it did to the *Athenians Acts* 17. 32. but the Apoſtle ſtates the Caſe right, 1 *Cor.* 15. 35. in Anſwer to that Queſtion, *Some man will ſay, How are the dead raiſed up, and with what body do they come? thou fool, that which thou ſoweſt is not quickned except it die. And that which thou ſoweſt, thou ſoweſt not that body that ſhall be, but God giveth it a body*, &c. Where he firſt of all confirms it by a like Inſtance in Nature, and then reſolves it into the Power of God.

'Tis for want of theſe Two Conſiderations, that is, of the Underſtanding of Nature, the Order, Power, and Operation of ſecond Cauſes; and of the Power of God, the Supreme Cauſe, that we often miſtake about the Credibility of things;

things; and judge that to be Impoſſible and Incredible, which in it ſelf, and often in the Event proves to be Poſſible and Credible.

And thus it frequently fares in matters of Fact, of the Credibility or Incredibility of which, we are as liable to miſtake, as about the Poſſibility or impoſſibility of Effects in Nature; when we judge of other Nations and Ages by our own, and of what we do not know, by what we do; and ſometimes are ſo vain as to reaſon againſt others Experience and Obſervation. Thus it was with the Ancients, that thought the Torrid-Zone Uninhabitable; and with others, that accounted the Opinion of Antipodes Fabulous and Impoſſible. Hence it is that the Errors of former Writers are ſo often Corrected by Modern Obſervations. But this we may confidently affirm of the Holy Scripture, that after it has ſtood the Teſt of above Three thouſand Years in whole or in part (for ſo long is it ſince the time of *Moſes*) and that nothing has been left unattempted by its Adverſaries to overthrow its Authority, it has yet maintained it, ſo as to be the moſt Exact, Faithful, and Impartial Relation the World ever had.

For the better Judging of whoſe Veracity, and Confirming its Credibility, we may obſerve;

1. That a great part of it carries with it its own Evidence, and has the common Consent of Mankind to attest it. Such I account the History of the Creation of the World, the Formation of Man, and the Degeneracy of Human Nature, to be. The first of these was universally acknowledged; nor was the Creation of the World ever Questioned or Disputed, till above a Thousand Years after the time of *Moses* (as *Aristotle*, who was of that Opinion, acknowledges, *de Cœlo, lib.* 1. *cap.* 10.). And the last was the Observation of all Ages.

2. There is a Relation of such things in Scripture, as have in them the face and appearance of Truth; and of which no certain or tolerable account can be given by any other Monuments of History that are, or ever were extant in the World. Such are the Age of the World; the Dispersion of Nations; the Variety of Languages; the Distribution of Time, *&c.*

Now if the Account given of these things in Scripture be True, we are capable of Solving the greatest Difficulties as to these Matters. And that they are True, there is good Reason to conclude. As for Instance, let us consider the Instances before given, *viz.*

1. The

(1.) The Origine of the World as it is in *Geneſis*. I acknowlege there may be nothing in the Compoſition of it, or in the Courſe of Nature, to determine this Point more in favour of *Moſes*, than of the *Egyptians*, *Chaldeans*, or *Chineſe*. But to lay aſide all other Arguments from the Novelty of Arts and Sciences, and the reputed Inventors of them; it is certain that in the Account given by *Moſes* there is an Exact Order, the Narration begins and is carried on with a ſtrict Coherence; and let us trace it back from the Flood to *Adam*; or from *Abraham* (ſuppoſe) to the Flood, there is a very regular Relation of Perſons and things. But beſides the Incredibility of the other, of the Thouſands of the *Egyptians*, the Hundred thouſands of the *Chaldeans*, and the Millions of the *Chineſes*; it all ends at laſt in Fable, in Apotheoſes, or imaginary Gods and Heroes, and Self-Contradictions (as has been ſhewn by many Learned Writers on this Argument).

(2.) As to the Diſperſion of Nations, and the Conſequents of it, the Pedigree of *Moſes* is juſtified in the Names of Places agreeing with thoſe of the Perſons; as has been abundantly proved by *Bochart* in his *Geographia Sacra*. And which would appear to the Eye of every Reader, if a Table was made of the Tenth Chapter of *Geneſis*,

neſis, and compared with the Ancient Geography; and ſhould have been here inſerted, were there a place for it.

(3.) As to the Diſtribution of Time, there is an orderly Progreſſion, both with reſpect to the Genealogies of Families, and the ſeveral Periods from the Creation to the Flood, from thence to the Law at *Sinai*, from thence to the Rearing of *Solomon*'s Temple, from thence to the Captivity, and from that to our Saviour's Death. Time and Place are good Characters of the Truth of any matter of Fact, as well as good Marks and Directors; and carry in them a great appearance of Truth where they are to be found. And then none can be preſumed to be more certain than the Scripture, where the Relation theſe had to the Meſſiah, and each Perſon had to his Tribe, and each Tribe to its Place and Situation, made them to be ſcrupulouſly exact and Critical.

3. There are other things that are highly Credible, and have nothing difficult to be admitted; and if admitted, are a wonderful Inſtance of the Divine Providence; as in the Puniſhment of profligate and incorrigible Wickedneſs, in the Two Notorious Examples of the Deluge and *Sodom*; 2 *Pet.* 2. 5, 6: So in the Preſervation of Pious Perſons, ſuch as *Noah*, *Abraham*, *Lot*, *Joſeph*, *David*, &c.

But

But above all is this evident in God's erecting, eſtabliſhing, guiding and preſerving his Church, when in *Egypt*, in *Canaan*, though perpetually ſurrounded with watchful and malicious Adverſaries; and recovering ſo much of it out of Captivity as was ſufficient in a continued Succeſſion to anſwer the end of accompliſhing all the Scripture-Prophecies in the Perſon of the *Meſſiah*, that was to deſcend from the Lineage of *Abraham*, the Tribe of *Judah*, and the Family of *David*.

So that as the Ancient Genealogies, together with the Chronology of Scripture, were carefully recorded, to demonſtrate to ſucceeding Generations that the World had a beginning, and a late beginning in compariſon: So the later Genealogies from *Abraham* were very exactly preſerved, that ſo it might appear to all the World, that what had been foretold above 1800 years before, was in its order and time punctually fulfilled: Which if the Genealogies had been loſt or confounded, could not have been obſerved; and ſo we had been wanting in a conſiderable Evidence of the Deſcent of our Saviour, and conſequently of his being the *Meſſiah*.

Indeed the whole Scripture Hiſtory is little elſe than the Hiſtory of Divine Providence; where there is an admirable concatenation of Relations

of

of various kinds, but all ſubſervient to the ſame End; and were there an Extract made of it, and all the Events rehearſed, and Operations therein deſcribed, brought into one entire Body, it would be the beſt Commentary on that Divine Subject in the whole World, and infinitely beyond any Human Compoſure.

4. There are other things that are difficult, either as to the Relations themſelves, or the manner and circumſtances of them; but what ſhould no more prejudice us againſt the truth and certainty of the things related, and much leſs of the whole, than the Difficulties of Divine Providence ſhould warrant us to deny it; and for want of not underſtanding ſome of its Operations, or Events, we ſhould take encouragement to deny what we do underſtand. 'Tis an excellent Saying of St. *Auſtin*, *De Doctrina*, l. 4. c. 6. (ſpeaking of the Divine Writers) "Where I do underſtand them, there is nothing ſeems to me "more wiſely or more eloquently expreſſed: "But where I do not underſtand them, there to "me appears leſs of their Eloquence; but yet I "do not doubt it to be ſuch, as it is where I underſtand it.

We ought rather to ſuſpend our Cenſure, with the modeſty of this Father, and for the ſake of

of what we do underſtand, think the more favourably of what we do not.

And therefore, as when we have uncontroulable Reaſon to believe a Providence, the difficulties about it are no ſufficient reaſon to call the Doctrine of Divine Providence into queſtion: So when we have ſo great reaſon to believe the Scripture's Relation of things to be true, the Difficulties about it ought not to derogate from its Veracity; nor give us the confidence any more to queſtion the Truth of Scripture, than the Certainty of Providence. For by this way of proceeding, not only the Truth of Scripture, but of all other Books whatſoever will be overthrown; nay the plaineſt and moſt obvious appearances in Nature. And yet of this kind are many of the Objections that are brought into the Field, and are made to ſerve in the Cauſe of Impiety: Such as theſe, "That we don't know in-"to whoſe hands thoſe Books have fallen, nor in "what Copies ſuch various Readings have been "found; or whether there are not more of that "kind in other hands. *Theol. Polit. c. 7.*

The iſſue of all which is, That if this will invalidate the Truth of Scripture, it will alſo invalidate that of all Writings whatſoever; and ſo is no more to be regarded, than an Argument againſt Motion,

Motion, which is rather to be contemned than anſwered.

'Tis but reaſonable then that we ſhould give the ſame quarter to the Scripture, that we allow to other Writings. And therefore all Objections levell'd againſt the Scriptures, which will equally be managed againſt any others, ought not to be allowed, unleſs we will give credit to nothing but what we our ſelves hear and ſee: And then to carry on the Cauſe, We muſt recede again, ſince there are thouſands of Caſes happen, where even our own Senſes may be ſubject to Error and Miſtake.

II. Another Character for the proof or diſcovery of the truth of Hiſtory, is Self-conſiſtence and Agreement.

This is a neceſſary Character, and abſolutely requiſite to all true Hiſtory; for nothing more ſhews the weakneſs and injudiciouſneſs of a Writer, than that he comprehends not his own Deſign; and 'tis a ſign he doth not comprehend it, that contradicts himſelf, and makes one part to diſagree with another.

I grant that this alone is not an infallible Character of Truth, that it is ſelf-conſiſtent; for where the Plat is wholly fictitious and imaginary, there

there may be an exact agreement throughout the whole: The Model may be ſo regularly ſquared, and laid out, that there may be a becoming Symetry; and Place, and Time, and all Circumſtances made to concur, to ſet it off with the greater advantage. But though this may be, where Truth is not; yet that cannot be true, which is without it, Truth being always conſiſtent with it ſelf. But there is this above all others obſervable in Scripture, That it is a Syſtem of ſeveral Books, wrote by ſeveral Perſons, in ſeveral Ages, on ſeveral Subjects; and yet however different in Style and Phraſe, Method and Order, are like the ſeveral Features in the Face, that beſides the ſweetneſs in each alone, there is what we call Beauty, that ariſes from the mixture of all.

Thus it is in the Sacred Hiſtory, which has a great variety in it of matter, diſperſed up and down ſometimes to quicken the Appetite, and excite the Diligence of the Reader, where each has its Order and Uſe: But when conſidered in one complex Body, and compared and ſhewn together, there is ſuch a wonderful Agreement between the *Old Teſtament* and the *New*, the Types and Anti-Types, the Predictions and the Events, *&c.* that it makes a very beau-

teous, lively, and admirable Appearance, without any such inconsistencies as may make it liable to have its Veracity questioned, if duly consider'd, and seriously examined.

I say, if duly consider'd, and seriously examin'd; for else it must be acknowledged, that there are some appearances of this kind.

1. But I account not those to be Inconsistencies, which in other Authors may justly be esteemed Errors of the Transcribers; and for which no Author suffers in his Reputation. As for instance, When the Famous Historian *Herodotus* in one place saith, That *Homer* lived about Four hundred Years before his Time; and in another place, That it was about Six hundred. This escape doth not lessen his Reputation among Judicious Persons; but for all that, he preserves the Character of *Pater Historiarum*, and is esteemed as no injudicious or careless Writer. And so if a greater number in Scripture is taken for a less, or a less for a greater, when there are sufficient Directions therein for the Correction of it; 'tis not reasonable to charge this as an inconsistency, and to urge it as a reason for the overthrowing the Credit and Veracity of it.

Euterpe. c. 53. *Vita* Hom.

If

If it be ſaid, How doth it appear that they are the Faults of the Tranſcriber?

A. I Anſwer, 'Tis apparently ſo ſometimes, as may be obſerved in the various Readings; which could not be, were there not ſuch miſtakes in the Tranſcriber: And where it doth not appear ſo to be, we ought in reaſon ſo to judge, where there are all the appearances of Faithfulneſs, Diligence, and Obſervation in the Writers themſelves. As for inſtance, What can be more exactly Penn'd than the Book of *Joſhua*, in which there is a punctual account of the Scituation and bounds of each Tribe, as it was ſet out and deſcrib'd by *Joſhua* himſelf, the Chief Arbiter and Director of all; and if there ſhould be found in his Book any Literal Errors, one Name put for another, or a different Reading of the ſame Names, we cannot in reaſon judge it to be an overſight of ſo Sufficient, and ſo Careful a Writer, but that it might proceed from ſome one that Tranſcribed it after the Αυτογραφον, or Original Copy, in ſome ſucceſſive Generations, and which in reaſon 'tis impoſſible wholly to prevent.

'Tis not here neceſſary for me to enter upon a debate, how far the Providence of God doth herein concern it ſelf in preſerving the Text free

from all Corruptions: I am now Treating upon this Argument humanly ſpeaking, and of the Truth of it ſeparately from its Divine Authority. And admitting there are ſuch petty Errors that creep in by ſuch imperceptible ways, though we cannot tell when or how they came in, and have been diſſeminated into all Copies, for ought we know, that are Extant; yet I don't know any reaſon why they ſhould be charged upon the Original and the Compiler of it; nor how the main Cauſe is herein concerned.

It is a reſpect due and given to all Authors of any Repute for their Care and Fidelity, that Write conſiſtently as to the main, to paſs the moſt favourable Conſtruction upon any ſuch little Errors; which if theirs, were not voluntary; or rather, not to make them theirs, without an apparent neceſſity for it.

And ſurely we ſhould not then preſs the caſe with the utmoſt ſeverity, and make that, which is in it ſelf, and in all Books beſides, a Venial Error, to be no leſs than a Mortal one in the Scripture, and to ſtab its Veracity to the heart, and ſpoil its Credit for ever for the future.

If it be ſaid there is more reaſon for this in the caſe of Scripture than in any other Book; becauſe That alone pretends to Divine Authority.

I Anſwer,

I Anſwer, That for the preſent is not the matter under Conſideration; we are now upon the Point of its Truth, and content our ſelves to enter upon this Debate, as if it had no pretence to Divine Authority and Inſpiration.

And ſo we claim the ſame Favour and Right on its behalf, as we do for any other Author's Credit and Repute, of great Antiquity; and general Reception.

And therefore there ought no ſuch Arguments or Objections to be urg'd for the Invalidity of its Authority, which it is not decent or reaſonable to offer againſt other Writings; and we may reaſonably claim the ſame allowance for that which all Mankind do give, or in reaſon ought to give, in things of this natuie.

2. I don't account theſe to be Inconſiſtencies or Contradictions, which do not affect the main body or part of the Hiſtory; but that are like a Parentheſis in a Sentence, that whether inſerted or omitted, the ſence is perfect and compleat. And therefore when the Hiſtory of *Jacob* bleſſing his Sons is the Subject under Conſideration; whether it was as *Gen.* 47. 31. *He bowed himſelf upon the bed's-head*, or as *Heb.* 11. 21. *He worſhipped ----- upon the top of his ſtaff*; is not material.

And

And ſo it may be in many caſes beſides; But what real prejudice will redound to the Reader by the miſtake of any thing of this kind, or what prejudice is there to the Relation, when a thing of no moment is omitted or inſerted, exchanged or altered? I ſay not this as if I deſpaired of having an account given of theſe matters (for that I am ſenſible is to be done, as in the Caſe before-recited) but to ſhew how unreaſonable it is to condemn Scripture for that which we will let others go away with, free from all Blame and Cenſure; and they ſhall be good and laudable Writers, and their Hiſtories admitted to be true and exact, though they have many Errors of this kind; and in the mean while the other ſhall be ſifted to the very bottom, and every Molehill be a Mountain; and upon every little ſuppoſed defect, it ſhall be ſaid, *It has been weighed in the balance* of Reaſon and Examination, and has been *found too light.*

Thus partial are theſe ſort of perſons, while they malevolently lay the Right hand upon the youngeſt, and their Left upon the eldeſt.

If indeed the inconſiſtency were like a Diſeaſe in the Vitals, that affects the Heart or the Brain, it is to be accounted Mortal; if it did affect the main

main Body of the Relation, and had originally proceeded from the Author, it would have been a juſt Allegation, and his Truth and Fidelity, his Knowledge, and his Care might with good reaſon be called in queſtion. But that we deny; and appeal to all the various Readings and Obſervations on Scripture as our Compurgators in this point. And conſequently the Scripture will ſo far remain as a true Relator of matters of Fact, and may compare with, and be deſervedly ſet above all other Writings whatſoever; in which no one Man, whoſe hand paſs'd through the whole Work, can compare with that to which ſo many Hands in various Circumſtances, at ſeveral times did ſo exactly concur and agree, as if they had been wrote by one Hand and at one Time, and were but one intire Argument running through the whole.

III. Another Character is the Agreement of Scripture with other Authors; when ſuch there are.

I may well ſay, when ſuch there are.

Since it is evident that there are no Writers can pretend to the like Antiquity with *Moſes*; and then we muſt wholy rely on his Authority for what he relates. But however, though the moſt

moſt ancient among the Heathens are much later than him, and ſo wanted thoſe Advantages for Information which he had; yet they (ſo far as they agree with him) give a Confirmation and Credibility to what he relates, ſince they deliver it as the Senſe of the Ages before, and of thoſe in which they themſelves lived. It is not here ſo much to our purpoſe to enquire from whence they derived the knowledge of the things they relate, whether from the Jews, or from the general Tradition (which was beſt to be known from the Eaſtern Parts of the World) as it is to obſerve their concurrence in them with the Sacred Writers. It is indeed probable that the Ancient Writers of the Heathens were (if at all) leſs beholding to the Jews for their Information, and the Later more; as may be obſerved from the great difference between the one and the other, the later being much plainer in many things than the former: For the higher we aſcend from the time of the Olympiads, the more intricate, obſcure, and fabulous they are. So that generally ſpeaking, it is with them as *Plutarch* ſaith of Geographers, That rather than leave any vacant places in their Maps, fill them up with inacceſſible Mountains, Frozen Seas, or Monſters. So when ſuch Hiſtorians would compleat

compleat their Narratives; rather than be deficient in it, they inſert wonderful and tragical Stories; and like Nations that can give no account of their Pedigree and Original, derive themſelves from the gods, or from the Earth, and become *Aborigines*.

But however, though this be too truly the ſtate of the World for about 3000 Years from the Creation; yet there is a mixture of fine Gold with the greater droſs; and from whence we may extract ſo much as may ſerve to confirm what the Scripture advances for Truth, and we for the ſake of it receive as ſuch; as might be ſhewn.

This is a Tract has been often beaten by Ancients and Moderns, by *Ariſtobulus* and *Joſephus* among the *Jews*; by ſeveral of the Fathers, ſuch as *Juſtin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, *Euſebius*, &c. and by many in theſe Days. And it were eaſy to form a Hiſtory out of them; eſpecially if we change but the Names, and inſtead of *Saturn*, read *Adam*; and inſtead of *Pandora*, *Eve*; inſtead of the Garden of *Jupiter*, *Eden*; inſtead of *Ogyges* or *Deucalion*, *Noah*, &c. for we ſhould find more of the Truth under the diſguiſe of the Fable than at the firſt appears; and that the former gave occaſion frequently to the later. *Bochart*, *Huetius*, Dr. *Stillingfleet*, &c.

But over and above this, we have a great part of the Ancient Hiſtory of Scripture confirm'd by the expreſs Teſtimony of ſome of their graveſt and ſtricteſt Writers, as the Collection that has been made in that way by ſeveral of the Learned, ſhews. To go no further than that of *Moſes*, who is placed by ſome of them in the firſt rank of the chiefeſt Lawgivers, and whoſe Wonders in *Egypt*, and at the *Red-Sea*, are not obſcurely referr'd to by them.

4. When there is a Diſagreement between the Scripture and other Authors, there is ſufficient reaſon to prefer the former before the later, and to rectify theſe by that. As for the firſt 3000 Years it is acknowledged, That there was elſewhere little elſe than Fable and Conjecture, Confuſion and uncertain Tradition, as has been before obſerved: And who is there that is not able to ſee the difference between an *Adam* and a *Saturn*, a *Noah* and *Bacchus*, a *Moſes* and *Mercury*; between the Building of the *Babyloniſh* Tower, and the War of the Giants with the gods; that is, between the true Hiſtory and the Fable?

Who can obſerve the various Accounts amongſt the Pagan Writers, their inconſiſtencies one with another, their apparent ignorance of what they write about, eſpecially when it concerns other Nations

Nations or Ages, than thoſe in which themſelves liv'd; but muſt needs ſurrender up the Cauſe, and own that the one has much the advantage of the other in point of Credibility?

So that ſetting aſide the Divine Authority of Scripture, yet it has upon it all the Characters of Truth, which any Book or Books in the World can pretend: And if there be any thing neceſſary more than what thoſe have, to eſtabliſh its certainty and Credibility, that is not wanting. In concluſion, After all the attempt made to weaken its Authority, it is with no better ſucceſs than that of *Celſus* or *Hierocles*, who endeavoured to ſet up an *Ariſteas* or an *Appollonius*, in Competition with our Bleſſed Saviour; and oppoſed their pitiful Shifts and Impoſtures, to his approved and inconteſtable Miracles.

But there is ſomewhat farther to be reſpected. Hitherto we have conſider'd the Scripture as able and ſufficient to ſupport it ſelf without any ſupernatural Aid; and by the ſole evidence of Humane Teſtimony, and ſuch Characters as belong to other Writings in common with that: But there is a further point in reſerve, and which I had chiefly in my Eye, and that is an Authority ſuperior to all others, and peculiar to Scripture, That I mean of Divine Revelation; and what for the matter

ter of it was inſpired from above. And this, the due Conſideration of it as an excellent Hiſtory will open a way to; when we find not only all the Principles, Precepts, and Means, that are neceſſary to a virtuous Life therein taught and preſcribed; but alſo admirable Examples of it in Fact, that nothing might be wanting to animate and incourage us to the like practice. See it in the *Noah*'s, the *Abraham*'s, the *Joſeph*'s, the *Job*'s, the *Moſes*'s, the *David*'s, and all the Patriarchs of old. See it in the Holy Apoſtles, the Martyrs and Confeſſors; but above all in the Example of Examples, our Bleſſed Saviour.

Here is a Hiſtory, that fills the Mind with the beſt Ideas and Images of things, that repreſents the Inſtances of our Duty with all the advantage to our Thoughts, that recommends it ſelf to our Attention by the importance and profitableneſs of the Argument, as well as the force of its Authority. Upon this therefore let us dwell, and make it the delightful Subject of our moſt ſerious Hours, which will abundantly reward all our Pains, and is ſufficient to *furniſh us throughly unto all good Works.* *FINIS.*

ERRATA.

PAge 11. l. 19. for *Compoſers* r. *Compoſures*, ibid. l. 23. after *Glory of God*, add *to the manifeſtation of*, p. 16. l. 19. for *them* r. *the Jews*, p. 18. l. 3. after *events* add *therein*.

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